

CALIFORNIA POETS IN THE SCHOOLS

CELEBRATES 45 YEARS OF BRINGING POETRY TO STUDENTS STATEWIDE

by Terry Glass



[California Poets in the Schools \(CPITS\)](#) is celebrating its 45th year as a statewide literary organization serving 25,000 students each year in over 25 counties from Humboldt

to San Diego. It is the nation's largest writers in the schools program, with over 100 professionally trained poets working in approximately 280 schools (K-12) annually.

MANY CHANGES

CPITS has been through many changes since its inception. It started out as part of the Pegasus Project at San Francisco State University, placing poets in Bay Area classrooms to read poetry to children. The poets soon began teaching children to write poetry. CPITS became its own non-profit organization in the mid-1970's and expanded to other counties throughout the state. Currently, two members of the board, Cathy Barber and Susan Sibbet, are serving as interim Co-Executive Directors overseeing a staff of three in the San Francisco office. Terri Glass serves as Program Director, responsible for recruitment of new poet-teachers and coordinating the statewide program through grant writing and supporting the local area coordinators. With new leadership, this long-running organization has transformed into a stronger and more viable non-profit that hopes to keep expanding even during the current economic downturn.

CPITS began with funding by the [California Arts Council \(CAC\)](#) and the [National Endowment for the Arts](#). Since that time it has diversified its funding base with support from corporate, community, and private foundations, and a membership and individual donor program. It still receives strong support from the CAC that includes sponsoring [Poetry Out Loud](#), a program that teaches the art of

recitation and performing of poems to high school students, and [Statewide Networks](#), a program supporting organizational capacity and community building through advocacy. Some of CPITS's poet teachers are excellent performance poets, and they are all accomplished writers. They are from diverse cultural and ethnic heritages and from all walks of life. An enormously talented group of individuals, they are dedicated to bringing the possibilities of creative expression through poetry into the classroom.

FOCUS ON WRITING

The primary focus of CPITS is to encourage students to write, using their imagination, life experience, and special perceptions to create poetry. CPITS's poets serve as living models of commitment to imaginative language and creativity, and are uniquely capable of sharing an artist's insights with students.



Each year CPITS hears from classroom teachers how beneficial it is to have a poetry residency in their school.

SENSITIVITY AND DELIGHT

"The language arts program was deepened and enriched, but the long-range effects of exposure to this poet may be even more significant." MC Houts, Neil Cummins School, Corte Madera

"There is a sensitivity and delight in words and word play that a poet by nature offers, especially the poet-teacher that visited our classroom." Libby Silvestri, Lu Sutton School, Novato.

"Having a poet come to our class was a special experience for all the students. The creativity, passion and experience a poet brings to teaching poetry is of the highest value." Jennifer Warner, Tomales Elementary, Tomales

WHAT THE WORLD HEARS

The best of students' poetry is collected for local and statewide anthologies. This year a special collection



of student, poet teacher and alumni poet teachers' poems will celebrate the 45th anniversary of CPITS in an anthology called

What the World Hears, due out in November of 2009. CPITS also recently launched a blog created and designed by Los Angeles poet Kirsten Ogden. Check it out at <http://cpits.wordpress.com/>. For more information about CPITS visit www.cpits.org. For specific questions about poet-teacher residencies contact Terry Glass at terri@cpits.org.

All photos by California Poets in the Schools

To learn more about [Poetry Out Loud](#) contact Kristin Margolis, Literary Arts Specialist, at kmargolis@cac.ca.gov; for [Statewide Networks](#), contact Lucero Arellano, Arts Specialist for Multicultural & Rural Arts, at larellano@cac.ca.gov.

